DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 339 CG 018 819

AUTHOR Bidelman, Kathy Gilden
TITLE Selecting a College: A Checklist Approach. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Fact Sheet.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services, Ann Arbor, Mich.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 85
CONTRACT 400-83-0014
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC/CAPS, 2108 School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Applicants; *College Bound Students; *College Choice; *Decision Making; High Schools; High School Students; Information Seeking; *Information Sources; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This fact sheet provides a checklist for selecting a college. Student objectives and college characteristics are considered and 17 educational and personal interest areas frequently cited as important by students are listed. Other areas covered include: computer programs and guidebooks, sources for gathering information, applying for admission, responding to admission offers, and a list of resources. (NRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

HIGHLIGHTS ...An ERIC/CAPS Fact Sheet

ED266339

Selecting A College: A Checklist Approach

Finding, selecting and applying for the right college or university is an important and sometimes tough assignment that many high school students and their parents have to face. It involves letter writing, telephoning, research, weighing alternatives, and plain hard thinking (*College-Bound Digest*, 1983). But with planning and a step-by-step approach, chances of making a good decision are high. This fact sheet provides a checklist for selecting a college, including the following: student objectives and college characteristics, selection by computers and guidebooks, gathering information, applying for admission, responding to admission offers, and a list of resource documents.

Starting With A List of Objectives

Selecting a college has lasting effects: what students become four years later is influenced by which college they choose, and how they go about getting into it once they have selected it (*The Insider's Guide*, 1981). No two colleges are exactly alike, and some are *very* different. There are more than 3,000 colleges, universities, technical institutes, junior colleges, seminaries, and other institutions of higher education in the United States (*The College Handbook*, 1984).

A good beginning in selecting a college is to make a list of objectives, both educational and personal. High school courses need to be planned early with college entrance requirements in mind. The purpose is not to make decisions about a course of study that may turn out to be premature, but to keep the options open until such decisions can be made.

The areas of educational and personal interest that students most frequently cite as important in selecting a college include the following:

- ☐ Location (state, city, region)
- ☐ Type of institution (two-year community college, four-year university, etc.)
- ☐ Enrollment by sex
- ☐ Religious affiliation, if any
- ☐ Enrollment size
- ☐ Academic calendar
- ☐ Campus environment
- ☐ Majors or course offerings
- ☐ Housing (on-campus, off-campus)
- ☐ Cost
- ☐ Financial aid
- ☐ Student activities
- ☐ Athletics
- ☐ General academic reputation
- ☐ Social life
- ☐ Entrance requirements
- ☐ Teaching reputation or ability of faculty

Obviously, not all of these items will be of high priority, but using them as a checklist helps to specify the range of choices. Although students may want to make changes or modifications in the list as they review colleges, it is important not to eliminate any of these areas until students know which are essential and which are not. Even then, it is quite possible that no college will meet *all* of an individual's needs.

Using Computer Programs and Guidebooks

The microcomputer is an excellent tool in the college selection process. The College Board's College Explorer, Peterson's College Selection Service for Four-Year Colleges, and Peterson's Selection Service for Two-Year Colleges are microcomputer programs that assist students in locating colleges with the features they want. A complete summary can be displayed on the screen, or a list of colleges that match the students' requirements can be printed for later reference. Many high school guidance offices and public libraries now offer these services. If the service is not available, the same information can be obtained, with a little effort, from the following commercial guidebooks:

- *Lovejoy's College Guide*
- *The College Handbook*
- *Peterson's Annual Guide*
- *One Hundred Top Colleges: How to Choose & Get In*
- *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*
- *Barron's Guide to the Best, Most Popular, & Most Exciting Colleges*
- *American Universities and Colleges*
- *The College Blue Book*

College counselors recommend these standard guides, which are updated annually. They differ in style and content, and some go beyond facts and statistics to provide "inside" information gathered from students and alumni.

Acquiring More Information

After drawing up a list of preferred colleges, students are ready to gather information and explore their choices in depth. The more information they acquire, the more likely they will make a good decision. Making a file on each college and keeping copies of correspondence, applications, personal notes, financial aid information, and names of personal contacts and conversations with people on campus can serve as excellent sources for making the final choice.

The primary sources for gathering information on colleges include the following:

- **College catalogs** — basic source of information about a college containing detailed information on admission procedures and policies, academic and degree requirements, costs, student life, and financial aid. Available directly from the college, or sometimes from a high school counselor, school library, or public library.
- **College representatives** — students may meet with representatives from colleges, such as the director of admissions and admissions officers, to obtain more information or answer individual questions.

CG018819

- **College visits** — campus visits are one of the most effective means to determine if the college is the right one (*College-Bound Digest*, 1983). Many colleges provide campus tours and programs which give an excellent opportunity to get a feeling of size and atmosphere. Ideally, these visits can be combined with an admissions interview.
- **College students, faculty, or recent alumni** — talking to current students is an excellent way to gather first-hand impressions and personal opinions about a college and student life. If it is not economically or geographically possible to visit the campus, the admissions office can provide names of alumni representatives who live in the student's area.
- **High school counselors** — as trained professionals, guidance counselors can provide invaluable information.
- **Parents and friends** — according to a group of recent college-bound students, family and friends are one of the best sources of information about colleges (*The College Handbook*, 1984). They can be a good source of information, opinions, and trustworthy advice.
- **College fairs/college nights** -- many high school guidance offices schedule regular visits from college representatives during the senior year. College fairs are particularly helpful to those who have not had the opportunity to visit many college campuses or talk with college representatives (*Guide to Colleges in the Midwest*, 1984). These fairs provide an excellent opportunity to talk to many college representatives and gather information the same day.
- **Commercial guidebooks** — see section, "Using Computer Programs and Guidebooks."

Applying for Admission

The procedures for applying for admission vary from one college to another, but usually the first step is to obtain an application form from the college. This should be done as early as possible in the senior year, or at the end of the junior year if seeking early admission. Students applying for financial aid may also be required to meet early deadlines.

Filling out the application completely and carefully is very important. In addition, many colleges require a recommendation from the secondary school counselor, administrator, or teacher. It is the individual student's responsibility to file the completed application on time, meet deadline dates for submitting test scores, and file financial aid applications. The school counselor is the key resource for information on test scores, financial aid forms, deadline dates, and other particulars.

- **Application fee** — most colleges charge an application fee, usually not refundable even if the application is rejected.
- **Academic records** — the counselor submits a secondary school transcript or college transfer record of student courses, final grades, and test scores.
- **Admission test scores** — for many students, the college selection process begins with the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), which is taken in the fall of the junior year. High school counselors advise students which of the college entrance tests to take — Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Testing Program Test (ACT), Achievement Test (ACH), and the Advanced Placement Tests (AP) — and when to take them.
- **Letters of recommendation** — some colleges require one or more letters of recommendation from a teacher, counselor, clergy, alumnus, or adult member of the community.
- **Essay** — a personal essay or autobiographical statement is required by some institutions, particularly four-year, private colleges (*The College Handbook*, 1984).

Responding to Admission Offers

Once students have heard from all the colleges to which they have applied, it is their responsibility to send a letter of acceptance or rejection of admission offers. According to a 1980 report on undergraduate admissions policies published by the College Board, 83 percent of all college applicants can expect to be accepted by their first-choice college (*The College Handbook*, 1984).

In Summary

The steps described in this fact sheet can serve students as a useful checklist for finding, selecting, and applying to college. By following these steps, students can lay the basic groundwork for a rewarding college experience.

Resource Documents

American universities and colleges. (1983). Hawthorne, NY: Walter de Gruyter, Inc.

Barron's guide to the best, most popular, & most exciting colleges. (1982). Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series.

Barron's profiles of American colleges: Descriptions of the colleges. (1982). Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series.

Colburn, K. A. (1980). *A review of issues in computer-assisted counseling and a new approach in its applications in college selection*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of New Hampshire, Durham. (ED 195 891)

College-bound digest. (1983). Northbrook, IL: Who's Who Among American High School Students. (ED 235 710)

Colleges: Picking by computer. (1985). *Better Homes and Gardens, 63*(5), 25.

Friedman, R. (1984). Questions for high school students to think about when choosing colleges. *The Journal of College Admissions, 103*, 23-27.

Kaye, K. R. (Ed.). (1984). *Guide to colleges in the midwest*. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides.

Kaye, K. R. (Ed.). (1984). *Guide to four-year colleges 1985*. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides.

Litten, L. H., & Brodigan, D. L. (1982). On being heard in a noisy world: Matching messages and media in college marketing. *College and University, 57*(3), 242-264. (EJ 263 318)

McClintock, J. (1982). *One hundred colleges: How to choose & get in*. New York: John Wiley, Inc. (ED 224 449)

Nicholson, J. M. (1983). A guide to the college guides. *Change, 15*(1), 16-21, 46-50. (EJ 276 715)

Straughn, C. T., II, & Straughn, B. L. (Eds.). (1985). *Lovejoy's college guide*. New York: Monarch Press.

The college blue book. (1983). New York: MacMillan.

The college handbook 1984-85. (1984). New York: College Entrance Examination Board.

The insider's guide to the colleges. (1981). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Kathy Gilden Bidelman
Information Specialist, ERIC/CAPS

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. 400-83-0014. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.